



# Alexandria Times

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## Out of the Attic

### Civil War veterans' organizations

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*Image: . Souvenir badge from the 36th National Encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic held in Washington, D.C. It was owned by a veteran of the Defenses of Washington and the Battle of Fort Stevens. Courtesy, Fort Ward Museum and Historic Site.*

The end of the Civil War left the nation to pick up the pieces of the shattered Union and rebuild. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers had died. For those who survived, the aftermath was also a time of renewal. Many of the survivors had physical or mental scars. All who served were changed forever.

As early as 1863, veterans' organizations formed so that members could support each other and their families. These veterans eventually began to look back on their time in the military with fondness, the horrible memories of war softening with the passage of time. Soldiers and sailors missed the camaraderie of army life most of all.

The largest organization of Civil War veterans was the Grand Army of the Republic. It was founded in 1866 with membership open to honorably discharged veterans of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Revenue Cutter Service who served between April 12, 1861 and April 9, 1865. At its peak, there were about 410,000 members active at local posts spread throughout the country.

The GAR was able to use its membership to build soldiers' homes and to lobby for the rights and benefits of those who served the Union. Five United States presidents were members of the Grand Army of the Republic. Annual gatherings of GAR members were known as encampments.

The final encampment was held in Indianapolis, Indiana in 1949. The last member of the organization, Albert Woolson, died in 1956 at age 109.

The Confederate counterpart to the Grand Army of the Republic was the United Confederate Veterans. This organization was formed in 1889 as an educational, social and historical organization that aided the well-being of its members. The last member of the organization died in 1952.

By the mid-1870s, men from both sides of the conflict began holding joint reunions for veterans of the war. Both the Grand Army of the Republic and the United Confederate Veterans raised funds to promote the heroes of their causes, building monuments in their honor. While there are no veterans of the Civil War left to tell their stories, their legacy of bravery and camaraderie in both war and peace remains.





## Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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To learn more about Civil War veterans' organizations and soldier life in the Civil War Defenses of Washington, visit Fort Ward Museum & Historic Site on Saturday for special Veterans Day tours at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

*"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.*

*These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.*